

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that all time be considered expired and the confirmation vote be at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, March 19.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

#### EXECUTIVE SESSION

#### EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 465.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Edward Sunyol Kiel, of New Jersey, to be United States District Judge for the District of New Jersey.

#### CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. SCHUMER. I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

#### CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Executive Calendar No. 465, Edward Sunyol Kiel, of New Jersey, to be United States District Judge for the District of New Jersey.

Charles E. Schumer, Richard J. Durbin, Brian Schatz, Mazie K. Hirono, Tina Smith, Gary C. Peters, Amy Klobuchar, Raphael G. Warnock, Catherine Cortez Masto, Alex Padilla, Mark R. Warner, Tim Kaine, Sheldon Whitehouse, Martin Heinrich, Christopher A. Coons, Margaret Wood Hassan, Peter Welch.

#### LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. SCHUMER. I move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

#### EXECUTIVE SESSION

#### EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 463.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Eumi K. Lee, of California, to be United States District Judge for the Northern District of California.

#### CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. SCHUMER. I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

#### CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Executive Calendar No. 463, Eumi K. Lee, of California, to be United States District Judge for the Northern District of California.

Charles E. Schumer, Richard J. Durbin, Sheldon Whitehouse, Mazie K. Hirono, Alex Padilla, Margaret Wood Hassan, Tim Kaine, Tammy Duckworth, Thomas R. Carper, Tina Smith, Jeff Merkley, Catherine Cortez Masto, Martin Heinrich, Christopher Murphy, Debbie Stabenow, Brian Schatz, Chris Van Hollen.

Mr. SCHUMER. I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum calls for the cloture motions filed today, March 14, be waived.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. SCHUMER. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland.

#### ISRAEL

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Madam President, during his State of the Union Address last week, President Biden once again rightly pointed out that Israel has the right and I would say the duty to defend itself in the aftermath of the brutal Hamas terror attack of October 7 that left approximately 1,200 brutally murdered and 240 taken hostage. There must be no more October 7s.

President Biden also described the ongoing humanitarian disaster taking place in Gaza today. Over 31,000 Palestinians have been killed—over two-thirds of them women and children—and likely thousands more unaccounted for, buried beneath the rubble. Gaza has become a hellhole of human suffering. Humanitarian organizations that have operated worldwide for decades say they have never witnessed a more terrible situation.

Among those suffering in Gaza are not only over 2 million innocent Palestinian civilians but also over 130 hostages still held by Hamas, including Americans.

Earlier this week, I met with some of the families of Israeli hostages whose loved ones were kidnapped and are still being held captive, as well as one brave woman who was held hostage and released during the November pause.

Every day that they are separated from their loved ones, not knowing what will happen to them next, is a day of unimaginable mental anguish and torment. That is why we must prioritize the release of the hostages and end the suffering of Palestinian civilians. The only way to do that is to secure an immediate cease-fire and release all of the remaining hostages. That must happen, but until it happens, we must do everything in our power to protect innocent civilians and end the humanitarian disaster in Gaza. Today, four out of five of the hungriest people on Earth are in Gaza. Hundreds of thousands of them are on the verge of starvation, and over 23 children have crossed that grisly threshold and have died of starvation. Cindy McCain, the Director of the World Food Programme, has warned of an imminent famine. Injured children are having their limbs amputated without anesthesia. Sewage is spilling onto the streets, and humanitarian officials are seeing spikes in the spread of various preventable diseases, like diarrhea, among children.

Two weeks ago, the world got a glimpse of a horrible scene: Over 100 starving Palestinians were killed as they reached for food from trucks. In the aftermath of that horrible event, President Biden has ordered airdrops of food supplies. I support that decision because when people are starving, every parcel of food counts. But airdrops are just a drop in the ocean of need, so I was also glad to see the President order the building of a temporary port to help deliver more aid by ship. But that port will likely not be ready for at least 60 days, and even then, it will not be sufficient to meet the humanitarian need.

All of these extraordinary efforts to deliver aid by air and by sea are being undertaken when we know that during the prewar period, when there was already a near blockade of Gaza, about 500 trucks still crossed daily through the Kerem Shalom crossing into Gaza. And those 500 trucks crossed every day when the need was far less acute than it is right now.

So the obvious question is, Why? Why in the world should we have to resort to these extraordinary and more expensive means to deliver insufficient amounts of food and aid by air and sea when we could bring in sufficient amounts of food and aid by truck much more efficiently through Egypt's Rafah crossing and the multiple crossing points into Gaza from Israel?

The answer is because this is a man-made disaster.

The starvation in Gaza is not the result of food scarcity caused by drought or other natural disasters that we see in many parts of the world. This has been caused primarily because the Netanyahu government has used a series of tactics to restrict the amount of aid entering into Gaza. Anyone with eyes to see or ears to hear knows that.

Members of the Netanyahu government, like Smotrich and Ben-Gvir,

have made no secret of their intentions. In October, after the war began, Ben-Gvir said:

So long as Hamas does not release the hostages, the only thing that should enter Gaza is hundreds of tons of Air Force explosives—not one ounce of humanitarian aid.

Smotrich used his power as Finance Minister to block a shipment of flour that could feed 1.1 million people for a month in Gaza. The shipment was finally released 2 days ago after having been blocked for 5 weeks at least, all while people were starving.

At one point, Prime Minister Netanyahu said his government was allowing just the “minimum” amount needed, and that was at a time when he and others denied that there was even a humanitarian disaster in Gaza; denied that there was a scarcity of food in Gaza; denied that there was hunger in Gaza.

This is why President Biden has called out those restrictions and why he said in his State of the Union Address:

Humanitarian assistance cannot be a secondary consideration or a bargaining chip.

The President said that his administration is going to “insist that Israel facilitate more trucks and more routes to get more and more people the help they need—no excuses.”

More than 5 weeks ago, on February 2, 25 Senators sent a letter to President Biden, calling for the Netanyahu government to implement five specific actions to significantly increase the amount of humanitarian aid entering Gaza. To date, none of them have been fully implemented.

That is why many of us have called on President Biden to immediately invoke and implement the Humanitarian Aid Corridor Act, which is section 620I of the Foreign Assistance Act. Now that NSM—National Security Memorandum—20 is in place, which is based on an amendment that 19 of us proposed to the National Security Act, it is essential—essential—that the Biden administration enforce its terms to get humanitarian aid delivered where it needs to go. When people are starving, patience is not a virtue.

It needs to be said that getting humanitarian aid into Gaza is only half the battle. The other half and the more dangerous half is distributing the aid once it is inside of Gaza. It doesn't do any good if you can't safely transport the food to the people who are starving. In other words, you need a safe distribution system for aid inside Gaza. Now, the organization that is the primary distributor of assistance within Gaza has been an entity called the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, known by its shorthand as UNRWA. Americans may have not heard much about UNRWA, so I want to say a little bit about why UNRWA exists and what it does in Gaza and elsewhere. But before I do that, I want to jump to why this is a pressing issue right now.

The future of UNRWA is an urgent matter right now because Prime Min-

ister Netanyahu and his extreme right-wing allies want to get rid of it not just in Gaza but everywhere that it operates. And guess what. Prime Minister Netanyahu and folks on the far right in his government have wanted to abolish UNRWA not just since October 7 but since at least 2017. In fact, in 2018, Prime Minister Netanyahu actually changed official Israeli policy with respect to UNRWA, saying that they wanted to cut off all funding to UNRWA, even at a time that his security team warned that it could create instabilities throughout the region if that happened.

Now we have Republican Members of the House and Senate who are jumping on this bandwagon and saying they want to abolish UNRWA. And how do they want to do this? By inserting a provision in the State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs appropriations bill, which is being considered and debated right now as we gather here, to cut off all U.S. funding for UNRWA. That is what they want to do.

So let's go back to why UNRWA was created in the first place.

In 1949—a year after the establishment of the State of Israel—the United Nations formed a new agency to provide vital services for over 700,000 Palestinian refugees who were displaced during the first Arab-Israeli war. Back then, the idea was that UNRWA would provide services to Palestinian refugees until a just and durable solution to their plight was found. As we know all too well, over 73 years have passed without a resolution to that conflict, which is why UNRWA's mission remains essential. Among other services, UNRWA provides schools and primary health services to Palestinian refugees and their descendants in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank, and in Gaza.

I hope we all agree that the Palestinian people deserve to live in dignity. The way to do that is to ensure that they also have self-determination in a homeland of their own, just like every Israeli deserves dignity and self-determination in the Jewish and democratic State of Israel.

President Biden and I and many others believe that the only viable, long-term solution to this conflict is a two-state solution, and President Biden has put that idea forward as the best way to create some light at the end of this very dark tunnel. UNRWA was really intended to be a bridge until such a resolution was reached.

Prime Minister Netanyahu has stated very clearly that he is opposed to a two-state solution. He was opposed to the Oslo Accords, and he has been a severe opponent of the two-state solution. And as I said earlier, he also wants to eliminate UNRWA, which today is an organization of over 300,000 employees providing services to Palestinians in three countries and, as I said, also in the West Bank and Gaza.

Mr. President, 13,000 of those 30,000 UNRWA staff operate in Gaza—many of

them as teachers. Since the war started with the brutal Hamas attacks on Israel of October 7, UNRWA's schools in Gaza have shut down; and as a United Nations agency, it has deployed its resources to supply humanitarian relief to the civilian population there. It is the main vehicle for distributing humanitarian assistance in Gaza. It won't do any good to get humanitarian assistance into Gaza if you dismantle the U.N. organization principally responsible for delivering that aid to people in Gaza.

This morning, I met with chef Jose Andres, and I applaud him for his efforts and the efforts of the World Central Kitchen around the world, including in Israel and in Gaza. He said:

Support for UNRWA is vital. If you want to feed people you need to support UNRWA.

We may have a temporary port, but when the ship gets to the port, someone has to transfer that food and other assistance from the ship to the people who need it in Gaza, and UNRWA is the principal distributor of assistance. If you talk to the World Food Programme and others, they say very clearly they cannot replace that capacity that UNRWA has.

In late January, the Netanyahu government alleged that up to 14 of UNRWA's 13,000 employees participated in the horrific October attacks against Israel. These are, of course, very serious allegations, and UNRWA has taken them seriously. All agree that any individuals involved in that horror must be held accountable, and even though the Netanyahu government has not provided UNRWA with the underlying evidence, UNRWA immediately fired the alleged perpetrators.

The U.N. Secretary General also took swift action and announced the launch of a full and independent investigation, led by the U.N.'s highest investigative body, into the allegations; and that is ongoing. At the same time, President Biden suspended all U.S. contributions to UNRWA pending the outcome of that investigation. A number of other countries followed suit, as did the EU.

But, since then, two things have changed. First, the Netanyahu government has not shared the underlying evidence with UNRWA nor, as reported by The Wall Street Journal, has it shared the raw evidence with the United States. In fact, I urge every one of my Senate colleagues to read the classified report prepared by the DNI, and I especially urge my colleagues to read the intelligence assessments about the many other claims the Netanyahu government has made against UNRWA—and there have been many. I am sure that many of my colleagues are unaware of the fact that UNRWA has long provided both Israel and the United States with the names and identities of all its employees for full review and vetting. Now, Israel, of course, has far more extensive intelligence capabilities than UNRWA; but, apparently, they have never previously raised complaints about any of the

UNRWA employees on the lists given to them.

Second, the EU and many countries that initially suspended their financial support for UNRWA have since restored their contributions because they have acknowledged the desperation in Gaza and the irreplaceable nature of UNRWA. In fact, even prior to these allegations, UNRWA had asked the U.N. Secretary General to convene an Independent Review Group to assess whether UNRWA was doing everything within its power to ensure neutrality.

So, again, UNRWA in Gaza—an organization with a staff of 13,000 people—is delivering essential life-sustaining aid to over 2 million people. And what the EU and these other countries that have restored UNRWA funding recognize is that it is inhumane to cut off assistance to 2 million people because of the atrocious, alleged acts of 14. Punish the 14. Don't punish 2 million innocent Gazans, and that is why I believe that President Biden should restore this assistance now.

The notion that UNRWA is, somehow, a front group for Hamas is a total lie—pure and simple. The individual dispatched by President Biden to be the U.S. humanitarian coordinator in the region is a veteran diplomat, Ambassador David Satterfield. He has repeatedly debunked claims made by members of the Netanyahu government that humanitarian aid provided by UNRWA has been diverted to Hamas. Specifically, he said the following:

I have not received any allegations, evidence or reports of any incidence of Hamas diversion or theft of U.S. or other assistance or fuel from UN delivered assistance from any of our partners or from the Government of Israel since the humanitarian assistance resumed in Gaza October 21.

Not a single report from Israeli Government officials or anybody else about Hamas diverting aid that was being transported by UNRWA or other U.N. agencies.

My colleagues, you should all know that the individual overseeing operations on the ground in Gaza today is an American named Scott Anderson. He is a 21-year Army veteran from South Dakota. He is a no-nonsense guy. I urge every Senator to talk to him. The notion that Scott Anderson is part of a front organization for Hamas is patently absurd.

The truth is that before the war started, Prime Minister Netanyahu did not pretend that he wanted to dismantle UNRWA on the grounds that it was a proxy for Hamas. He has long wanted to eliminate UNRWA not only in Gaza but everywhere else that it supports education for Palestinian schoolchildren and healthcare for Palestinians, like in the West Bank and Jordan. As I said, he has been trying to do that since at least the year 2017. And now he has Republicans in Congress joining him and calling for the defunding of all U.S. support for UNRWA, not only in Gaza but throughout the region.

Attempts to discredit UNRWA and the U.N. have gotten so bad that 18 heads of all the major U.N. humanitarian and refugee agencies, together with NGOs like Save the Children and CARE, signed a statement calling for a “halt to campaigns that seek to discredit the United Nations and non-governmental organizations doing their best to save lives.” It is making it harder for them to save lives.

If you want to take a combustible situation in the West Bank and make it even worse, then close down schools for kids there. Take away any chance of an education. Snuff out any hopes they may have for a brighter future. Really?

If you want to create instability in Jordan, shut down UNRWA schools and services there. Why do we all think that King Abdallah has warned us about the consequences of shutting down UNRWA?

Here is the crazy thing about this moment: Prime Minister Netanyahu has seized on the lies about UNRWA being a proxy for Hamas in Gaza to achieve his long-term goal of shutting down UNRWA everywhere.

And what adds insult to injury is that UNRWA has not perpetuated Hamas in Gaza, but Prime Minister Netanyahu himself has done exactly that. Let me explain.

You know, there is a lot of talk here in the U.S. Senate about the malign actors who have supported Hamas over the years. One of them is a very malign actor, Iran.

Now, Iran did not create Hamas, nor does Iran exercise command and control over Hamas. But it does support Hamas because, like Iran, Hamas has the despicable goal of eliminating Israel. That is why Iran has supported Hamas.

But what we rarely, if ever, discuss is the inconvenient truth that, until the unexpected horror of the Hamas attack on October 7, Prime Minister Netanyahu himself saw it as in his interest to keep Hamas in control in Gaza.

Don't take my word for it. He told us in his own words back in 2019 at a Likud Party meeting where he said:

Anyone who wants to prevent the creation of a Palestinian state needs to support strengthening Hamas. This is part of our strategy to divide the Palestinians between those in Gaza and those in Judea and Samaria.

Prime Minister Netanyahu:

Anyone who wants to prevent the creation of a Palestinian state needs to support strengthening Hamas.

Mr. President, I would like to have printed in the RECORD a piece that appeared in Haaretz, in October of last year, entitled “A Brief History of the Netanyahu-Hamas Alliance.” I ask unanimous consent that it be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Haaretz, Oct. 20, 2023]

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE NETANYAHU-HAMAS ALLIANCE

(By Adam Raz)

For 14 years, Netanyahu's policy was to keep Hamas in power; the pogrom of October 7, 2023, helps the Israeli prime minister preserve his own rule.

Much ink has been spilled describing the longtime relationship—rather, alliance—between Benjamin Netanyahu and Hamas. And still, the very fact that there has been close cooperation between the Israeli prime minister (with the support of many on the right) and the fundamentalist organization seemingly evaporated from most of the current analyses—everyone's talking about “failures,” “mistakes” and “contzeptziot” (fixed conceptions). Given this, there is a need not only to review the history of cooperation but also to conclude unequivocally: The pogrom of October 7, 2023, helps Netanyahu, and not for the first time, to preserve his rule, certainly in the short term.

The MO of Netanyahu's policy since his return to the Prime Minister's Office in 2009 has and continues to be, on the one hand, bolstering the rule of Hamas in the Gaza Strip, and, on the other, weakening the Palestinian Authority.

His return to power was accompanied by a complete turnaround from the policy of his predecessor, Ehud Olmert, who sought to end the conflict through a peace treaty with the most moderate Palestinian leader—PA President Mahmoud Abbas.

For the last 14 years, while implementing a divide-and-conquer policy vis-a-vis the West Bank and Gaza, “Abu Yair” (“Yair's father,” in Arabic, as Netanyahu called himself while campaigning in the Arab community before one recent election) has resisted any attempt, military or diplomatic, that might bring an end to the Hamas regime.

In practice, since the Cast Lead operation in late 2008 and early 2009, during the Olmert era, Hamas' rule has not faced any genuine military threat. On the contrary: The group has been supported by the Israeli prime minister, and funded with his assistance.

When Netanyahu declared in April 2019, as he has after every other round of fighting, that “we have restored deterrence with Hamas” and that “we have blocked the main supply routes,” he was lying through his teeth.

For over a decade, Netanyahu has lent a hand, in various ways, to the growing military and political power of Hamas. Netanyahu is the one who turned Hamas from a terror organization with few resources into a semi-state body.

Releasing Palestinian prisoners, allowing cash transfers, as the Qatari envoy comes and goes to Gaza as he pleases, agreeing to the import of a broad array of goods, construction materials in particular, with the knowledge that much of the material will be designated for terrorism and not for building civilian infrastructure, increasing the number of work permits in Israel for Palestinian workers from Gaza, and more. All these developments created symbiosis between the flowering of fundamentalist terrorism and preservation of Netanyahu's rule.

Take note: It would be a mistake to assume that Netanyahu thought about the well-being of the poor and oppressed Gazans—who are also victims of Hamas—when allowing the transfer of funds (some of which, as noted, didn't go to building infrastructure but rather military armament). His goal was to hurt Abbas and prevent division of the Land of Israel into two states.

It's important to remember that without those funds from Qatar (and Iran), Hamas would not have had the money to maintain

its reign of terror, and its regime would have been dependent on restraint.

In practice, the injection of cash (as opposed to bank deposits, which are far more accountable) from Qatar, a practice that Netanyahu supported and approved, has served to strengthen the military arm of Hamas since 2012.

Thus, Netanyahu indirectly funded Hamas after Abbas decided to stop providing it with funds that he knew would end up being used for terrorism against him, his policies and his people. It's important not to ignore that Hamas used this money to buy the means through which Israelis have been murdered for years.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. After all, so long as Hamas was in control in Gaza, how could anyone ask Israel to accept a Palestinian State that included Gaza and the West Bank? It is a fair question.

So what are some of the ways in which Prime Minister Netanyahu has enabled Hamas to maintain its control in Gaza? Well, another thing we have heard a lot about around here is the money from Qatar that went to Hamas. It is well established that every penny of that money flowed from Qatar to Hamas with the concurrence of Prime Minister Netanyahu and Israel. That has been the testimony of witnesses in both the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee. It has also been well documented in numerous news sources.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD a CNN article entitled "Qatar sends millions to Gaza for years—with Israel's backing."

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From CNN, Dec. 12, 2023]

**QATAR SENT MILLIONS TO GAZA FOR YEARS—WITH ISRAEL'S BACKING. HERE'S WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT THE CONTROVERSIAL DEAL**

(By Nima Elbagir, Barbara Arvanitides, Alex Platt, Raja Razek, Nadeen Ebrahim, and Uri Blau)

Since the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel, the Gulf state of Qatar has come under fire by Israeli officials, American politicians and media outlets for sending hundreds of millions of dollars in aid to Gaza, which is governed by the Palestinian militant group. But all that happened with Israel's blessing.

In a series of interviews with key Israeli players conducted in collaboration with Israeli investigative journalism organization Shomrim, CNN was told Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu continued the cash flow to Hamas, despite concerns raised from within his own government.

Qatar has vowed not to stop those payments. Qatari minister of state for foreign affairs Mohammed bin Abdulaziz Al-Khulaifi told CNN's Becky Anderson on Monday that his government will continue to make payments to Gaza to support the enclave, as it has been doing for years.

"We're not going to change our mandate. Our mandate is our continuous help and support for our brothers and sisters of Palestine. We will continue to do it systematically as we did it before," Al-Khulaifi said.

Israeli sources responded by pointing out that successive governments had facilitated the transfer of money to Gaza for humani-

tarian reasons and that Netanyahu had acted decisively against Hamas after the October 7 attacks.

Here's what we know about those payments and Israel's role in facilitating them.

**WHEN DID THE QATARI PAYMENTS START?**

In 2018, Qatar began making monthly payments to the Gaza Strip. Some \$15 million were sent into Gaza in cash-filled suitcases—delivered by the Qataris through Israeli territory after months of negotiation with Israel.

The payments started after the Palestinian Authority (PA), the Palestinian government in the Israeli occupied West Bank that is a rival of Hamas, decided to cut salaries of government employees in Gaza in 2017, an Israeli government source with knowledge of the matter told CNN at the time.

**WHAT DID ISRAEL KNOW ABOUT HAMAS' OCTOBER 7 ATTACK?**

The PA opposed the Qatari funding at the time, which Hamas said was meant for the payment of public salaries as well as medical purposes.

Israel approved the deal in a security cabinet meeting in August 2018, when Netanyahu was serving his previous tenure as premier.

Even then, Netanyahu was criticized by his coalition partners for the deal and for being too soft on Hamas.

The prime minister defended the initiative at the time, saying the deal was made "in coordination with security experts to return calm to (Israeli) villages of the south, but also to prevent a humanitarian disaster (in Gaza)."

Ahmad Majdalani, an Executive Committee member at the Palestine Liberation Organization in the West Bank, accused the United States of orchestrating the payment.

The US was aware of the Qatari payments to Hamas, a former senior State Department official involved in the region told CNN on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter.

Qatar was prepared to provide funds to the Gaza Strip through Hamas as early as the 2014 Israel-Hamas war to alleviate the humanitarian crisis there, the official said, and the US at the time left it up to the Israelis to decide whether they would permit this.

"We deferred completely to the Israelis as to whether this was something they wanted to do or not," the official said.

**WHY DID ISRAEL BACK THE PAYMENTS?**

Israeli and international media have reported that Netanyahu's plan to continue allowing aid to reach Gaza through Qatar was in the hope that it might make Hamas an effective counterweight to the PA and prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state.

PA officials said at the time the cash transfers encouraged division between Palestinian factions.

Major General Amos Gilad, a former senior Israeli Defense Ministry official, told CNN the plan was backed by the prime minister, but not by the Israeli intelligence community. There was also some belief that it would "weaken Palestinian sovereignty," he said. There was also an illusion, he added, that "if you fed them (Hamas) with money, they would be tamed."

Shlomo Brom, a former deputy to Israel's national security adviser, told the New York Times that an empowered Hamas helped Netanyahu avoid negotiating over a Palestinian state, saying the division of the Palestinians helped him make the case that he had no partner for peace in the Palestinians, thus avoiding pressure for peace talks that could lead to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.

The former State Department official said that after the 2014 war, Israel felt it was bet-

ter off with Hamas controlling Gaza as opposed to multiple Islamist groups, or leaving it in a political vacuum.

"It was our impression that the Israelis were comfortable with keeping Hamas in power in a weakened form," the official said. "Our understanding was that Hamas was the lesser of a whole bunch of bad options in Gaza," the official added, noting that at least the competing PA could keep Hamas out of the West Bank.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD a New York Times article from December of last year entitled "'Buying Quiet': Inside the Israeli plan that propped up Hamas."

The sub headline is "Prime Minister Netanyahu gambled that a strong Hamas (but not too strong) would keep the peace and reduce pressure for a Palestinian state."

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From New York Times, Dec. 10, 2023]

**'BUYING QUIET': INSIDE THE ISRAELI PLAN THAT PROPPED UP HAMAS**

(By Mark Mazzetti and Ronen Bergman)

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu gambled that a strong Hamas (but not too strong) would keep the peace and reduce pressure for a Palestinian state.

Just weeks before Hamas launched the deadly Oct. 7 attacks on Israel, the head of Mossad arrived in Doha, Qatar, for a meeting with Qatari officials.

For years, the Qatari government had been sending millions of dollars a month into the Gaza Strip—money that helped prop up the Hamas government there. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel not only tolerated those payments, he had encouraged them.

During his meetings in September with the Qatari officials, according to several people familiar with the secret discussions, the Mossad chief, David Barnea, was asked a question that had not been on the agenda: Did Israel want the payments to continue?

Mr. Netanyahu's government had recently decided to continue the policy, so Mr. Barnea said yes. The Israeli government still welcomed the money from Doha.

Allowing the payments—billions of dollars over roughly a decade—was a gamble by Mr. Netanyahu that a steady flow of money would maintain peace in Gaza, the eventual launching point of the Oct. 7 attacks, and keep Hamas focused on governing, not fighting.

The Qatari payments, while ostensibly a secret, have been widely known and discussed in the Israeli news media for years. Mr. Netanyahu's critics disparage them as part of a strategy of "buying quiet," and the policy is in the middle of a ruthless reassessment following the attacks. Mr. Netanyahu has lashed back at that criticism, calling the suggestion that he tried to empower Hamas "ridiculous."

In interviews with more than two dozen current and former Israeli, American and Qatari officials, and officials from other Middle Eastern governments, The New York Times unearthed new details about the origins of the policy, the controversies that erupted inside the Israeli government and the lengths that Mr. Netanyahu went to in order to shield the Qataris from criticism and keep the money flowing.

The payments were part of a string of decisions by Israeli political leaders, military officers and intelligence officials—all based on the fundamentally flawed assessment that

Hamas was neither interested in nor capable of a large-scale attack. The Times has previously reported on intelligence failures and other faulty assumptions that preceded the attacks.

Even as the Israeli military obtained battle plans for a Hamas invasion and analysts observed significant terrorism exercises just over the border in Gaza, the payments continued. For years, Israeli intelligence officers even escorted a Qatari official into Gaza, where he doled out money from suitcases filled with millions of dollars.

The money from Qatar had humanitarian goals like paying government salaries in Gaza and buying fuel to keep a power plant running. But Israeli intelligence officials now believe that the money had a role in the success of the Oct. 7 attacks, if only because the donations allowed Hamas to divert some of its own budget toward military operations. Separately, Israeli intelligence has long assessed that Qatar uses other channels to secretly fund Hamas' military wing, an accusation that Qatar's government has denied.

"Any attempt to cast a shadow of uncertainty about the civilian and humanitarian nature of Qatar's contributions and their positive impact is baseless," a Qatari official said in a statement.

Multiple Israeli governments enabled money to go to Gaza for humanitarian reasons, not to strengthen Hamas, an official in Mr. Netanyahu's office said in a statement. He added: "Prime Minister Netanyahu acted to weaken Hamas significantly. He led three powerful military operations against Hamas which killed thousands of terrorists and senior Hamas commanders."

Hamas has always publicly stated its commitment to eliminating the state of Israel. But each payout was a testament to the Israeli government's view that Hamas was a low-level nuisance, and even a political asset.

As far back as December 2012, Mr. Netanyahu told the prominent Israeli journalist Dan Margalit that it was important to keep Hamas strong, as a counterweight to the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. Mr. Margalit, in an interview, said that Mr. Netanyahu told him that having two strong rivals, including Hamas, would lessen pressure on him to negotiate toward a Palestinian state.

The official in the prime minister's office said Mr. Netanyahu never made this statement. But the prime minister would articulate this idea to others over the years.

While Israeli military and intelligence leaders have acknowledged failings leading up to the Hamas attack, Mr. Netanyahu has refused to address such questions. And with a war waging in Gaza, a political reckoning for the man who has served as prime minister for 13 of the last 15 years, is, for the moment, on hold.

But Mr. Netanyahu's critics say that his approach to Hamas had, at its core, a cynical political agenda: to keep Gaza quiet as a means of staying in office without addressing the threat of Hamas or simmering Palestinian discontent.

"The conception of Netanyahu over a decade and a half was that if we buy quiet and pretend the problem isn't there, we can wait it out and it will fade away," said Eyal Hulata, Israel's national security adviser from July 2021 until the beginning of this year.

#### SEEKING EQUILIBRIUM

Mr. Netanyahu and his security aides slowly began reconsidering their strategy toward the Gaza Strip after several bloody and inconclusive military conflicts there against Hamas.

"Everyone was sick and tired of Gaza," said Zohar Palti, a former director of intelligence for Mossad. "We all said, 'Let's forget about Gaza,' because we knew it was a deadlock."

After one of the conflicts, in 2014, Mr. Netanyahu charted a new course—emphasizing a strategy of trying to "contain" Hamas while Israel focused on Iran's nuclear program and its proxy armies like Hezbollah.

This strategy was buttressed by repeated intelligence assessments that Hamas was neither interested in nor capable of launching a significant attack inside Israel.

Qatar, during this period, became a key financier for reconstruction and government operations in Gaza. One of the world's wealthiest nations, Qatar has long championed the Palestinian cause and, of all its neighbors, has cultivated the closest ties to Hamas. These relationships have proved valuable in recent weeks as Qatari officials have helped negotiate for the release of Israeli hostages in Gaza.

Qatar's work in Gaza during this period was blessed by the Israeli government. And Mr. Netanyahu even lobbied Washington on Qatar's behalf. In 2017, as Republicans pushed to impose financial sanctions on Qatar over its support for Hamas, he dispatched senior defense officials to Washington. The Israelis told American lawmakers that Qatar had played a positive role in the Gaza Strip, according to three people familiar with the trip.

Yossi Kuperwasser, a former head of research for Israel's military intelligence, said that some officials saw the benefits of maintaining an "equilibrium" in the Gaza Strip. "The logic of Israel was that Hamas should be strong enough to rule Gaza," he said, "but weak enough to be deterred by Israel."

The administrations of three American presidents—Barack Obama, Donald J. Trump and Joseph R. Biden Jr.—broadly supported having the Qataris playing a direct role in funding Gaza operations.

But not everyone was on board.

Avigdor Lieberman, months after becoming defense minister in 2016, wrote a secret memo to Mr. Netanyahu and the Israeli military chief of staff. He said Hamas was slowly building its military abilities to attack Israel, and he argued that Israel should strike first.

Israel's goal is "to ensure that the next confrontation between Israel and Hamas will be the final showdown," he wrote in the memo, dated Dec. 21, 2016, a copy of which was reviewed by The Times. A pre-emptive strike, he said, could remove most of the "leadership of the military wing of Hamas."

Mr. Netanyahu rejected the plan, preferring containment to confrontation.

#### HAMAS AS 'AN ASSET'

Among the team of Mossad agents that tracked terrorism financing, some came to believe that—even beyond the money from Qatar—Mr. Netanyahu was not very concerned about stopping money going to Hamas.

Uzi Shaya, for example, made several trips to China to try to shut down what Israeli intelligence had assessed was a money-laundering operation for Hamas run through the Bank of China.

After his retirement, he was called to testify against the Bank of China in an American lawsuit brought by the family of a victim of a Hamas terrorist attack.

At first, the head of Mossad encouraged him to testify, saying it could increase financial pressure on Hamas. Mr. Shaya recalled in a recent interview.

Then, the Chinese offered Mr. Netanyahu a state visit. Suddenly, Mr. Shaya recalled, he got different orders from his former bosses: He was not to testify.

Mr. Netanyahu visited Beijing in May 2013, part of an effort to strengthen economic and diplomatic ties between Israel and China. Mr. Shaya said he would have liked to have testified.

"Unfortunately," he said, "there were other considerations."

While the reasons for the decision were never confirmed, the change in tack left him suspicious. Especially because politicians at times talked openly about the value of a strong Hamas.

Shlomo Brom, a retired general and former deputy to Israel's national security adviser, said an empowered Hamas helped Mr. Netanyahu avoid negotiating over a Palestinian state.

"One effective way to prevent a two-state solution is to divide between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank," he said in an interview. The division gives Mr. Netanyahu an excuse to disengage from peace talks, Mr. Brom said, adding that he can say, "I have no partner."

Mr. Netanyahu did not articulate this strategy publicly, but some on the Israeli political right had no such hesitation.

Bezalel Smotrich, a far-right politician who is now Mr. Netanyahu's finance minister, put it bluntly in 2015, the year he was elected to Parliament.

"The Palestinian Authority is a burden," he said. "Hamas is an asset."

#### SUITCASES FULL OF CASH

During a 2018 cabinet meeting, Mr. Netanyahu's aides presented a new plan: Every month, the Qatari government would make millions of dollars in cash payments directly to people in Gaza as part of a ceasefire agreement with Hamas.

Shin Bet, the country's domestic security service, would monitor the list of recipients to try to ensure that members of Hamas's military wing would not directly benefit.

Despite those assurances, dissent boiled over. Mr. Lieberman saw the plan as a capitulation and resigned in November 2018. He publicly accused Mr. Netanyahu of "buying short-term peace at the price of serious damage to long-term national security." In the years that followed, Mr. Lieberman would become one of Mr. Netanyahu's fiercest critics.

During an interview last month in his office, Mr. Lieberman said the decisions in 2018 directly led to the Oct. 7 attacks.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. But Prime Minister Netanyahu's role in keeping Hamas in control in Gaza did not end there.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD a New York Times piece, again, from December of last year headlined: "Israel found the Hamas money machine years ago. Nobody turned it off."

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the New York Times, Dec. 16, 2023]

ISRAEL FOUND THE HAMAS MONEY MACHINE YEARS AGO. NOBODY TURNED IT OFF

(By Jo Becker and Justin Scheck)

Israeli security officials scored a major intelligence coup in 2018: secret documents that laid out, in intricate detail, what amounted to a private equity fund that Hamas used to finance its operations.

The ledgers, pilfered from the computer of a senior Hamas official, listed assets worth hundreds of millions of dollars. Hamas controlled mining, chicken farming and road building companies in Sudan, twin skyscrapers in the United Arab Emirates, a

property developer in Algeria, and a real estate firm listed on the Turkish stock exchange.

The documents, which The New York Times reviewed, were a potential road map for choking off Hamas's money and thwarting its plans. The agents who obtained the records shared them inside their own government and in Washington.

Nothing happened.

For years, none of the companies named in the ledgers faced sanctions from the United States or Israel. Nobody publicly called out the companies or pressured Turkey, the hub of the financial network, to shut it down.

A Times investigation found that both senior Israeli and American officials failed to prioritize financial intelligence—which they had in hand—showing that tens of millions of dollars flowed from the companies to Hamas at the exact moment that it was buying new weapons and preparing an attack.

That money, American and Israeli officials now say, helped Hamas build up its military infrastructure and helped lay the groundwork for the Oct. 7 attacks.

"Everyone is talking about failures of intelligence on Oct. 7, but no one is talking about the failure to stop the money," said Udi Levy, a former chief of Mossad's economic warfare division. "It's the money—the money—that allowed this."

At its peak, Israeli and American officials now say, the portfolio had a value of roughly half a billion dollars.

Even after the Treasury Department finally levied sanctions against the network in 2022, records show, Hamas-linked figures were able to obtain millions of dollars by selling shares in a blacklisted company. The Treasury Department now fears that such money flows will allow Hamas to finance its continuing war with Israel and to rebuild when it is over.

"It's something we are deeply worried about and expect to see given the financial stress Hamas is under," said Brian Nelson, the Treasury Department's under secretary for terrorism and financial intelligence. "What we are trying to do is disrupt that."

That was what Israel's terrorism-finance investigators hoped to do with their 2018 discovery. But at the top echelons of the Israeli and American governments, officials focused on putting together a series of financial sanctions against Iran. Neither country prioritized Hamas.

Israeli leaders believed that Hamas was more interested in governing than fighting. By the time the agents discovered the ledgers in 2018, the prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, was encouraging the government of Qatar to deliver millions of dollars to the Gaza Strip. He gambled that the money would buy stability and peace.

Mr. Levy recalled briefing Mr. Netanyahu personally in 2015 about the Hamas portfolio.

"I can tell you for sure that I talked to him about this," Mr. Levy said. "But he didn't care that much about it."

Mr. Netanyahu's Mossad chief shut down Mr. Levy's team, Task Force Harpoon, that focused on disrupting the money flowing to groups including Hamas.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. I want to quote from Mr. Levy, who is quoted in that article. He was the Mossad chief in charge of economic policy. He says: "I can tell you for sure that I talked to him"—referring to Prime Minister Netanyahu—"about this. But he didn't care that much about it."

The article goes on to point out that Mr. Netanyahu's Mossad chief shut down Mr. Levy's team, the task force called Harpoon that focused on dis-

rupting the money flowing to groups including Hamas.

So let's go back to why Prime Minister Netanyahu and his extreme right-wing allies, like Smotrich and Ben Gvir, wanted to keep Hamas in place in Gaza. It is because, as they have said, their primary goal was to avoid the establishment of a Palestinian State. And so long as they could keep the Palestinians divided, they could avoid a united national movement for such a state. And so long as Hamas was in control of Gaza, it proved a useful foil against recognizing a Palestinian State that included the West Bank and Gaza, until the horror of October 7.

The corollary of not threatening Hamas's control of Gaza has been to systematically weaken the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. The terrible irony, of course, is that while helping perpetuate Hamas—which was dedicated to the destruction of Israel and is dedicated to the destruction of Israel—Prime Minister Netanyahu and his allies have undermined the Palestinian Authority and the PLO, which, for over 30 years, since the Oslo Accords, have recognized Israel's right to exist and have sought to coexist with Israel.

Their strategy: Keep Hamas in place; undermine the Palestinian Authority.

In fact, even today, during the war in Gaza, Finance Minister Smotrich is withholding an even greater share of the PA's own funds, and, since coming to power, the Netanyahu government has advanced even more settlements and allowed even more outposts deeper in the West Bank. And, of course, that further undermines the legitimacy of the PA in the eyes of the Palestinian people by exposing their total inability to stop those actions, even as they, the PA, help provide to Israel with security in certain areas of the West Bank.

So Prime Minister Netanyahu has advanced the strategy of weakening the Palestinian Authority and facilitating Hamas in order to prevent Palestinians from being able to live in dignity in a state of their own. And the reason—the reason—that Prime Minister Netanyahu and the far-right extremists in his government, like Smotrich and Ben Gvir, don't want a Palestinian State in the West Bank is that they want it all for themselves in what they envision as a "Greater Israel."

If you have Palestinians in the West Bank or who stay in the West Bank, you can't implement the vision of a "Greater Israel"—their version of one state.

So we come full circle. UNRWA was established to be a bridge to provide services, like education, to Palestinian refugees after they were displaced. I am sure its founders did not expect it to be around for so long, but that is because they likely never envisioned that, 74 years later, the conflict that gave rise to UNRWA would remain unresolved.

But it is unresolved, and now Prime Minister Netanyahu has openly op-

posed President Biden's call to resolve it, ultimately, by enacting a real two-state solution that would include normalization of relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia and the other Arab countries that have yet to recognize Israel—important security needed for the Jewish State of Israel.

And at the same time that Prime Minister Netanyahu wants to torpedo a two-state solution to resolve the conflict, he also wants to pursue his long-term goal of ending the organization that was not born out of that conflict, UNRWA, and eliminating the services that it currently provides to Palestinian refugees.

The United States should not be complicit in this scheme. We should not be a party to defunding UNRWA in Gaza, which is, right now, playing a critical role in the delivery of desperately needed food and humanitarian assistance to starving people. Nor should we be complicit in defunding the essential services UNRWA provides in places like the West Bank, Jordan, and other places.

I support reforming UNRWA but not eliminating it. The question of defunding UNRWA is, at this very moment, the biggest unresolved issue in the Foreign Operations appropriations bill. I call upon responsible Members of Congress in the Senate and the House to ensure that the United States does not defund UNRWA.

Members of Congress who argue for the elimination of UNRWA have never bothered to drive a short distance from Jerusalem to visit an UNRWA school and hear young students talk about their dreams to be doctors, engineers, and educators, like some of us have done. There is hope in these schools, not hate, and, frankly, that is what we should be able to do here in the U.S. Senate.

We should be on the side of hope. We should not be a party to more people starving in Gaza. We should not be a party to the closing of schools for Palestinian students in the West Bank, Jordan, and other countries. And the United States should not be a party to creating even more instability in the Middle East.

Like many of my colleagues, and like President Biden, I believe the only way to create some light at the end of this dark tunnel is to find a path that ensures security for the Israeli people and dignity and self-determination for the Palestinian people.

That is why I stand with our colleague Senator SCHUMER and his important and timely comments this morning that rejecting the idea of Palestinian statehood and sovereignty is a "grave mistake" for regional security and especially for the security of Israelis and Palestinians.

Prime Minister Netanyahu has said that a two-state solution would be a big reward—reward, he says—for Hamas, but the opposite is true. Hamas has one plan: the destruction of the State of Israel and replacing the Jewish democratic state with one of their



own. They want one state. A two-state solution is contrary to everything Hamas stands for and all it seeks to achieve, so, far from being a reward, it would be a denial of their goal of one state under Hamas control.

We all know that the road ahead will be long, and it will be hard. In the aftermath of the horrific Hamas attacks of October 7 and the current humanitarian disaster in Gaza, it is hard to imagine a time of peace and stability. That will only come when Palestinian leaders who fully embrace the right of Israel to exist in security and Israeli leaders who recognize that Palestinians must have a viable state of their own both make the necessary risks for peace.

So let us push for an immediate cease-fire and a release of all the hostages, and then let us create a flicker of hope in this moment of darkness.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BOOKER). The Senator from South Carolina.

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, at a later date, I will respond to my colleague from Maryland about UNRWA.

But just to let people know who are following this today, I am the ranking Republican on the State, Foreign Ops Appropriations Subcommittee, and I work very well with Senator COONS. Senator VAN HOLLEN is on the committee. There will not be one dime for UNRWA in any bill I support, period. And that is not just me; that is Senator COLLINS. She is the ranking member who worked very well with Senator PATTY MURRAY to get the supplemental moving. Why is that? Because we believe UNRWA is compromised.

I will come and show you the textbooks that UNRWA uses in the Palestinian community to teach the destruction of the Jewish people. I will show you texts from people in charge of UNRWA on the ground celebrating October 7.

The case has been made over here that UNRWA is no longer a credible organization worth American taxpayer dollars to fund—not one penny for UNRWA.

Helping the Palestinian people begins with changing the way they are taught in school. After we defeated the Germans and the Japanese, it took us a long time to deradicalize a population that was taught from birth to be radical. So what I hope will happen over the course of time is that new people in charge of the Palestinian community in the West Bank and Gaza will stop teaching the death of the Jews, trying to give the Palestinian children a more hopeful life. I hope that happens one day soon.

The reason I came to the floor is I have been asked—probably like the Presiding Officer has—

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Will the Senator from South Carolina yield for a question?

Mr. GRAHAM. Let me finish. We will come and debate. I have a plane to catch.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. We really should debate because I don't know any evidence at all for your—

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Carolina has the floor.

Mr. GRAHAM. We will come down, and we will have a discussion about everything I said. Let me finish my thought.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Carolina has the floor.

Mr. GRAHAM. Yes. We will have a very vigorous discussion about how wrong you are to empower this group that has been perpetrating all of the wrong things, not the right things.

Now, having said all that—

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Will the gentleman yield on that?

Mr. GRAHAM. Let me finish my thought.

Senator SCHUMER, whom I have worked with on immigration, on a bunch of things—I have tried to be bipartisan when it comes to foreign policy. My colleague, the President of the Senate, has been one of my best friends in trying to find a way forward to get Saudi and Israel to recognize each other. That would be a big blow to Iran.

I have been asked, like everybody in the body: What do you think about Senator SCHUMER's speech?

I am dumbfounded. I have always respected him. I disagree with him politically. What he said today was earth-shatteringly bad. The majority leader of the U.S. Senate is calling on the people of Israel to overthrow their government.

Whether you like Bibi or not is not the question. The question is, Is it appropriate for anybody in this body telling another country to take their government down? We are going to have an election here. I hope we take the Biden government down through the election process, but that is for us to decide.

This has been very hurtful. I have been on the phone almost all day trying to explain to people what happened, and I don't have a good explanation.

We are trying to get Saudi Arabia to recognize the one and only Jewish State. That is no easy thing for the Crown Prince to do given this environment.

We are trying to get Israel to take a leap of faith here that it doesn't have to be this way all the time, to do some things that would allow the Palestinian community to reorganize.

Seventy-five percent of the Israeli people do not support a two-state solution now. They have been terribly wounded. There is no support by any politician in Israel—Gantz, Lapid, anybody—to unilaterally declare a Palestinian State.

Five Presidents of the United States have said that if there is ever a Palestinian State, it will come through direct negotiations, without conditions, between the parties.

In the Trump administration, Jared Kushner had a plan to establish a Pal-

estinian State that Prime Minister Netanyahu actually agreed with.

The point here is, what should America be doing now? America should be helping Israel without qualification. We should be trying to find a way to ease the suffering of the Palestinian people, and the best way to do that is to destroy Hamas. The reason so many Palestinians have been killed is because Hamas uses them as human shields.

We live in a world that is literally upside down. We are having prominent Democratic Members—people I respect—calling on the Israeli people to take their government down. I can't believe it. I thought it was a joke. I thought somebody was pranking me this morning. This is a departure in a very serious way about how the United States interacts with its allies. I think it has done enormous damage to very delicate negotiations. I hope that Senator SCHUMER will revisit this.

I don't know who he is trying to please by saying that, but they are not worth pleasing. I don't know who you are trying to please by saying that the Israeli Government needs to cease to exist as it is today and the Israeli people need to find somebody better, in the eyes of Senator SCHUMER.

I am not asking the Israeli people to elect somebody I like; I am asking them: Whenever you have an election, elect somebody you like. I am not asking the people of Israel to bow to my view of how to settle this matter after the largest loss of Jewish life since the Holocaust. I want to give unconditional, unqualified support to the people of Israel to destroy Hamas.

After World War II, if anybody had suggested to America that we need to take our foot off the gas when it came to destroying the Nazis and the Japanese, you would have been run out of town. What won the Oscar? A film called "Oppenheimer" talking about how the atomic bomb was created and used by our country to destroy two cities in Japan to end the war.

You have to understand—and the Presiding Officer does; you have done your homework—you have to understand that October 7, to the Israeli people, is Pearl Harbor and 9/11 on steroids. It is not just a tit-for-tat with Hamas; it was an attempt by Hamas to break the back of the Jewish people, to brutally rape and murder in a fashion they want the world to see.

So the Israeli perspective on what to do is similar to what we thought we should do after World War II: total, complete victory; everybody mobilize and do what you have to do to end the war, to take the Nazis down; and the Imperial Japanese Army—destroy it unequivocally.

Millions of people were killed in World War II. War is literally hell. But when you have been attacked the way we were on Pearl Harbor and 9/11, you have to respond forcefully. You have to make sure it never happens again. And the only way Israel can do this is to destroy the military capability of Hamas.

So why did this happen? I believe that the great Satan, which is Iran, wanted this to happen to prevent a reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and the State of Israel, ending the Arab-Israeli conflict. A nightmare for the Ayatollah is that the Arabs and the Jews make peace and economically integrate, leaving them behind.

Israel has signed agreements with six of their Arab neighbors under Bibi's leadership.

When I go, I meet with Lapid, I meet with Gantz, and I meet with Bibi. I meet with everybody because it is not about Bibi; it is not about Gantz; it is about our relationship. If it is Gantz or Lapid next time, I will meet with them. I know them all. Mr. Lapid and I are very good friends. I have known Bibi for 25 years. It is about, what should we do to help our friends in Israel?

Nothing would please me more than to find a way to end this war sooner rather than later and get back on track for their normalization process, but we cannot expect Israel to stop now. It is like putting 80 percent of a fire out—the 20 percent is going to start it all over again.

We are down to six brigades, organized military units that Hamas has to wreak havoc on the Palestinian people and the State of Israel. It is nonnegotiable; Hamas will be destroyed militarily.

I am hoping, in the middle of all this chaos, we can still find a way for Saudi Arabia and Israel to normalize. That would be the ultimate death blow, I think, to the Iranian ambitions in the region. Part of that deal, as the Presiding Officer knows, would be the Palestinians would have a better life eventually; that Saudi Arabia and UAE would invest heavily into Gaza and the West Bank; new, younger, less corrupt people running the place, trying to find a pathway forward where the Palestinians and Israel can coexist in a way that is beneficial for all.

That can never happen until Hamas is destroyed. If Hamas is still in place, they will kill everybody who wants to make peace with Israel. They did it before. They have no desire, as Senator VAN HOLLEN said, of recognizing the Jewish State.

But I will close where I began. What Senator SCHUMER said on the floor of the Senate is taking the country and the Senate down the wrong road. This is not something any of us should be saying—calling on a government to be toppled, basically, by its own people.

At the end of the day, Bibi is not the problem. The problem is radical Islam wanting to kill every Jew they can find. The problem is Iran, which has its mission to destroy the Jewish State and to purify Islam.

I could spend hours talking about the Biden-Obama policy of empowering the Ayatollah, but that is not for today.

So what I would say to what Senator SCHUMER said today—my response to Senator SCHUMER: I am disappointed.

You have done a lot of damage, my friend, and you need to fix this.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The President pro tempore of the U.S. Senate.

#### APPROPRIATIONS

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, we have now at long last passed our first six funding bills for fiscal year 2024. While we are still now working around the clock on the final six bills, I am hopeful we will pass them in a timely, bipartisan way very soon. But I do want to take a moment to step back and really dive into the six bills that we did pass last week and what they mean for my home State of Washington.

I come to work every day focused on how I can use my voice here to help folks back home. When I sit down at any negotiating table, I bring with me the stories of every parent who is struggling to afford childcare or groceries or rent; every farmer and fisher whose livelihood depends on our crops, our salmon, and our environment; every researcher focused on making the next big breakthrough; every mayor focused on improving our infrastructure; and every young person who is concerned about climate change and our most basic rights.

And I take those voices that I hear at home in Washington State—the people I meet—into every room I enter and write their concerns into every bill I negotiate. It is a responsibility I take very seriously, especially as chair of the Appropriations Committee.

And I am thrilled to say the legislation that we passed last Friday—the bill I wrote with my colleagues—includes more than a billion dollars I helped secure for local projects and programs in Washington State and delivers a historic \$3 billion investment for the Hanford site cleanup.

I have practically been a broken record in saying the Federal Government has a moral and legal obligation to properly fund the cleanup at Hanford. Our work is far from done. But with this historic \$3 billion investment, we are moving in the right direction.

And as long as I am Appropriations chair, I am going to make sure we keep up that momentum. No matter what, we are not going to shortchange the vital cleanup mission at Hanford.

We are facing a housing crisis. And it has been especially hard on families in Washington State. That is why I fought hard to make sure that bill protected and strengthened programs that help families afford the cost of housing and help keep families in their homes.

At the Federal level here, that means homeless assistance grants, eviction prevention grants, and Native American Housing Block Grants, rental assistance programs, programs that help people develop economic independence and help keep kids with their parents, and vital investments to maintain our Nation's affordable housing supply.

But it is not just funding for key national efforts that help Washington State. I am especially proud to have secured funding through congressionally directed spending for the Aurora senior housing development for seniors in Seattle, which will have 90 housing units.

That is a great start, but I know we have a lot more work to do when it comes to tackling the housing crisis. And I will keep pushing for progress with my colleagues every day.

In addition to the roof over their heads, families need food on the table. I held a roundtable in Seattle a few weeks ago, talking with experts and even a mom who depended on WIC; and as I told them, I take this personally.

I remember what it was like when my family fell on tough times and we had to rely on food stamps. Making cuts that leave our kids hungry was never an option for me, which is why I fought tooth and nail to make sure that bill fully funded WIC, which serves over 130,000 moms and kids just in my home State of Washington.

And we fully funded the brandnew permanent summer nutrition program I established—Summer EBT—which will now help feed half a million kids in Washington State alone this summer.

Plus, I secured \$1.8 million for the South Kitsap Helpline. This is a resource for struggling families to help expand food distribution. In the richest country in the world, there is no reason to leave our families hungry. It is really that simple.

Now, another important need for working families in Washington State, like in every other State, is childcare. I hear about the childcare crisis everywhere I go.

We are still negotiating the bill that funds the actual Federal investments in childcare. But guess what. For parents to have access to childcare, we need physical childcare centers close to where people live.

So a big priority of mine in the last package was working with local organizations to help them build or expand their childcare centers. And so through Congressionally Directed Spending, we are going to be constructing an early learning center in the Meridian School District and another in Lewis County that will serve 80 students a year; building 17 early childhood education classrooms at the Cora Whitley Family Center in Tacoma; and relocating a Head Start facility for the Spokane Tribe Indians.

We also provided new funding to design child development centers to expand access to childcare for our military families, something I know we need more of.

I remain focused on protecting and strengthening the Child Care Development Block Grant now as we negotiate the next set of bills.

And I will always work to pass my Childcare for Working Families Act, but I will keep fighting alongside that for every step of progress we can make.